

## Alternative Education Policy Statement for Charter Schools

The purpose of this document is to clarify for Charter Schools the types of alternative education schools/programs that can qualify as an approved grant and consequently for funding as determined by the formula outlined in IC 21-3-11-9.

### What is Alternative Education?

IC 20-10.1-4.6-4 defines an alternative education program as an alternative school or educational program that instructs eligible students in a *DIFFERENT* manner than the manner of instruction available in the traditional school setting and that complies with rules for governance and admission of alternative education programs.

Alternative education uses innovative approaches to create a caring, learning environment that is academically challenging while addressing the needs of the whole child. It is not intended as a second-rate, watered down or diminished educational opportunity. Alternative education takes advantage of reduced class sizes to create interactive learning environments that tap into student interests and abilities. In addition to academics, alternative education takes into consideration the social, emotional, and physical needs of the student and identifies any services the student or their family will need in order to meet the educational and behavioral goals identified in their Individual Service Plan (IC 20-10.1-4.6-6.7). Alternative education offers flexibility, involves parents and the community, and includes multiple components such as life skills, service learning, career preparation, mentoring, drug counseling, behavior management, career/vocational education, post-secondary dual enrollment opportunities, computer-assisted instruction, parenting programs, child care, anger management, challenge education, character education, etc.

Alternative education is NOT short-term punishment for undesirable behavior where the student completes assignments from his/her classroom teacher(s). Research has found that short-term programs and ones that assign students as a form of punishment do not generally show long term improvements in academic achievement or behavior. If a charter school designs an alternative education program for students with a history of disruptive behavior, the approach should follow a youth development model with components (behavior modification, anger management, counseling, etc.) for reconnecting and redirecting the behavior of the student in addition to innovative instructional strategies and content.

Alternative education is also NOT a special education program. However, special education students may participate in alternative education. If your charter school receives special education funding for the student, you cannot claim them for alternative education reimbursement unless the placement is unrelated to their disability.

Use the following steps to determine your potential qualifying status.

#### **\*\*You might qualify as a provider of alternative education if your charter school:\*\***

- ☐ Offers instruction that is **clearly** intended to reach the nontraditional learner and reconnect them to the learning process.  
*Generally this means that the instruction is more individualized, interdisciplinary, experiential, self-paced, or project-based than in traditional school settings.*  
*If using a packet or computer curriculum, it needs to be balanced with opportunities to interact with the teacher and other students in order to integrate or extend what has been learned.*

- ❑ Has created an academically and behaviorally supportive climate for highly at-risk students.  
*Teachers have high expectations for students. Positive relationships exist between students and teachers. Staff, students, and parents are treated with respect and dignity. The facility is safe and managed as a caring and violence-free environment.*
- ❑ Has a broad range of support services that address citizenship, behavior, social, emotional, family-related, and economic factors that may interfere with learning.  
*Guidance and counseling are integral to alternative education and may include effective parenting and child-care components. Efforts are made to connect students and their families to community or family support services.*
- ❑ Allows for flexibility and offers components that motivate students, removes barriers to learning, and helps students bridge the achievement gap.  
*Service learning, mastery learning, internships, mentoring, community-school partnerships, self-paced courses, etc. are common components of alternative education. However, alternative education is not a substitute for summer school, tutoring, credit recovery, remediation, ISS, after school programs, etc. although some of these components may be part of alternative education.*
- ❑ Uses assessments (academic or behavioral assessments, skills testing, learning styles inventories, etc.) to individualize instruction and evaluate progress.
- ❑ Has licensed teachers for students involved in alternative education.  
*511 IAC 1-9-3 requires that teachers in approved alternative education programs must be employed by the Charter School or in the case of a joint program, by one of the Charter Schools or School Corporations. In addition, teachers must meet the highly qualified requirements of NCLB.*
- ❑ Maintains a teacher-student ratio of 1:15 or less for students in alternative education.  
*This is computed with a qualified teacher counting as 1 and a teacher aide counting as .33.*
- ❑ Operates alternative education sessions for a minimum of two continuous hours (though sessions may be—and usually are—substantially longer) (511 IAC 1-9-2).
- ❑ Completes an Individual Service Plan (ISP) that is in compliance with IC 20-10.1-4.6-6.7.  
*The ISP must contain academic and behavioral goals, a description of the alternative education program that is appropriate for the student, and services required by the student and his/her immediate family to meet goals set out in the ISP. The ISP must be in writing, must be reviewed at least annually, and must be used to inform programmatic decisions that are made for individual students.*
- ❑ Serves eligible students.  
*IC 20-10.1-4.6-6.3 describes eligible students and IC 20-10.1-4.6-6.5 outlines the criteria for placement of students in an alternative education program.*
  - An eligible student must be enrolled in or eligible for Grades 6-12.
  - Eligible students must be likely to benefit academically, behaviorally, or both from participation in the program as jointly determined by the student's teacher and principal in consultation with their parent or guardian.  
*This implies that the student will make measurable progress as evidenced by academic and behavioral assessments. It also requires that the Charter School complete an Individual*

*Service Plan (ISP) for each student. The requirements for the ISP are found in IC 20-10.1-4.6-6.7.*

- A student placed in an alternative education program must meet at least one of the following criteria:

1. Student intends to withdraw or has withdrawn before graduation.  
*The Charter School should document measures of student disengagement along with what strategies have already been attempted for re-engaging the student in the ISP before placing them in the alternative education program.*
2. Student has failed to comply academically and would benefit from a different instructional approach than is available in the traditional school.  
*Students should be placed alternative education only after multiple measures in the regular programming have been unsuccessful. Typically, alternative education admits students that are failing significantly as measured by multiple failing grades, lowest quartile on ISTEP+/GQE, or having been retained. Students should only be placed in alternative education if the programming will allow the student to make significant gains. Placing students in a different location without modifying the instructional approach, is not sufficient to qualify it for alternative education funding.*
3. Student is a parent or expectant parent and is unable to regularly attend the traditional school.  
*Pregnant or parenting students are not required to attend an alternative program. However, students or schools may choose to place students in an alternative education program if they would benefit academically from the curriculum, flexibility or services offered.*
4. Student is employed and the employment is necessary for support AND it interferes with a part of the student's instructional day.  
*Both tests must be met in order for a Charter School to place a student in an alternative education program for this reason.*
5. Student is a disruptive student.  
*As defined in IC 20-10.1-4.6-1.6 this means that the student has a documented record of frequent disruptions despite repeated attempts to modify the student's behavior with a progressive disciplinary program. It implies that the school has specific disciplinary procedures designed to modify disruptive behavior in the traditional charter school that would be used BEFORE placing the student in the alternative education program.*

- ❑ Operates alternative education as a single or joint program.  
*IC 20-10.1-4.6-3 indicates that the governing body of a charter school may establish its own alternative education program/school or participate in a joint program. IC 20-5-11 states that a written agreement outlining the organization, administration, funding, etc. is required.*
- ❑ Agrees to expend on alternative education a matching amount of at least one-third the amount of the state grant (IC21-3-11-6 Sec.6 (b)).  
*It is recommended that these dollars, like the state distribution, be deposited in Fund 190, Receipt Acct. 3211. These funds are intended to cover the additional costs (materials, testing, field trips, professional development) associated with alternative education. The alternative education grant is not to supplant other funding.*

**If you checked all of the items above, you will need to determine if your charter school will apply as a PROGRAM or as a WHOLE SCHOOL. Work through the following sections to determine how to proceed.**

***\*\*You might qualify as an alternative education program if your charter school:\*\****

- ❑ Intends to identify specific students within your charter school that meet the eligibility criteria and offer an alternative education program specifically for these at-risk students in grades 6-12.  
*This type of program could operate as a classroom within the school, a school within a school, or as a program of the school located at a different site. In each case the alternative education program is considered a part of the charter school and as such, ISTEP+ scores, credits, diplomas, etc. awarded in the alternative education program are part of the charter school. Only students in the program would be eligible for alternative education funding.*

**Example:** The Sunnyside Charter School is a K-8 school that focuses on math and reading through cooperative, project-based learning. Sunnyside also includes a technology focus that helps prepare students for life after school.

The Sunnyside school leader has noticed that some students, upon entering 6<sup>th</sup> grade and higher, have developed significant academic problems, which have also led to some behavioral problems. Although teachers have tried to work one-on-one with these students to help them succeed, some of them are still struggling. The school leader, in conjunction with teachers and her board, creates a classroom-within-a-school program for these students, offering them individualized, differentiated instruction in a very small classroom setting. Program teachers, regular charter school teachers, the school leader, and the student and his/her family work together to create an ISP that details academic and behavioral goals, in addition to services that the student or the family may need. Teachers also help students with social skills and create a classroom climate that fosters school connectedness. In general, 10-12 of the most highly academically at-risk students in grades 6-8 are enrolled in the program. Students remain in the program between 1 semester and one year (though they may stay longer, if necessary), until they have successfully met the goals written into their ISPs. Upon meeting ISP goals, they return to the regular charter school classroom.

***\*\*You might qualify as an alternative education school if your charter school:\*\****

- ❑ Intends to serve highly at-risk students as identified under “eligible students” as the school’s **primary mission** and has adopted the philosophy of alternative education (which aligns with IC 20-10.1-4.6) in your school charter. Please keep in mind that although charter schools are alternatives IN education, this does not necessarily mean that they would all automatically qualify as whole-school alternative education settings.
- ❑ Has aligned staff, support services, and curriculum to address the needs of alternative education students (as identified under “eligible students”, IC 20-10.1-4.6-6.3).
- ❑ Has clearly stated policies and procedures designed to specifically support nontraditional learners and provide the flexibility they need to be successful.
- ❑ Has specifically targeted highly at-risk students (as identified under “eligible students in IC 20-10.1-4.6-6.3) in their promotional materials and recruitment practices.  
*All students in an alternative school that meet the eligibility criteria could be claimed for alternative education funding.*

*\*\*Please note: if your school does not qualify as an alternative education school, you will have to set up a specific program (as described on page 4) in order to qualify for alternative education funds.\*\**

**Example:** The John F. Kennedy Charter High School serves students in grades 9-12. The school's mission is to help highly at-risk students achieve educational, social, emotional, and career success. The ultimate goal is to help these students graduate and become productive members of their communities. Although all students who submit a timely application are given an equal chance to enroll in the school, Kennedy specifically markets itself as an alternative for students who are pregnant or parenting, have significant behavior problems, have dropped out, have jobs that interfere with the school day, or are significantly behind academically. Kennedy's philosophy is that its highly at-risk population needs a program that provides a holistic approach to individual student and family needs.

Though Kennedy has a general curriculum, its school leader and teachers understand that because of the population it targets and serves, that curriculum must be individualized based on student needs. In addition, Kennedy staff understands that because of its population, discipline and other policies must be flexible and managed on a case-by-case basis, depending upon student needs. As a result, when students enter the school, an ISP is prepared for them that details academic and behavioral goals and a special individualized program. Kennedy's classrooms have no more than 15 students to 1 teacher, and that teacher individualizes instruction for each student. Kennedy's programming includes service learning, individual projects that are chosen by students, a full-time counselor on staff, and anger management, conflict resolution, and social skills courses. In essence, Kennedy High School operates in very much the same way that a traditional school corporation's alternative school would.

## **Funding**

Eligibility for alternative education grant funding is based on PROGRAMMING and not on individual student qualities. In other words, this grant is not just to provide funding for at-risk students. This grant is to provide funding for alternative education programming, whether it is a program within a school, or a school-wide setting. Charter schools will qualify as school-wide only in rare circumstances and only when they can show that they have met the above criteria.

Once you have determined if your charter school qualifies to apply, you need to submit a grant application. Grants are completed online and a signed hard copy submitted to the Department by **June 10, 2005**. To submit online, go to <http://www.doe.state.in.us/alted/> and look in the 'Find It Fast' box. When prompted, enter your charter school corporation number and your PIN. If you have questions, contact Sue Foxx at [sufoxx@doe.state.in.us](mailto:sufoxx@doe.state.in.us) or 317-233-3598 or Kimb Stewart at [kstewart@doe.state.in.us](mailto:kstewart@doe.state.in.us) or 317-234-2137. As soon as the grant has been reviewed, your Charter School will get a letter from the Department indicating if the grant was approved or denied. The Division of Education Options reserves the right to make final determinations regarding eligibility and reimbursement.

**Approved grants** are eligible to claim fiscal reimbursement based on the number of full-time equivalent students (1 FTE student = a student that attended two sessions for 180 days) during the preceding calendar year. FTE student counts are collected in January and the distribution is sent out before March 1. Be advised that the amount per FTE student varies depending on the number of students that participate in alternative education programming in a given year. The maximum is \$750 per year. For 2004, the amount per FTE student was \$550. Charter schools also need to understand that since the reimbursement will be for calendar year 2005, they are only eligible to receive up to half of the FTE student amount since they will have only operated for the fall semester.